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Seventeenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 352nd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 18 July 1997, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. KHAN

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Third periodic report of Australia (CEDAW/C/AUL/3)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Nairn (Australia) took a place at the Committee table.

2. Ms. NAIRN (Australia) said that the third periodic report of Australia (CEDAW/C/AUL/3) had originally been prepared in 1993 as a supplement to the second periodic report, and should have been taken up by the Committee in 1995; Australia could then have combined its third and fourth periodic reports. Lengthy delays between the submission of reports and their consideration by the Committee hindered constructive dialogue between the Committee and States parties; her Government had therefore welcomed the General Assembly's decision to approve additional sessions for the Committee.

3. Unfortunately, the third periodic report had been prepared without input from non-governmental organizations, and her Government had not been in a position to prepare a supplementary report. The preparation of reports was resource-intensive, especially in a federal system like that of Australia. Already in 1997 her Government had submitted an implementation report on the Beijing Platform for Action, which was available to the Committee.

4. Australia had put in place a framework of anti-discrimination legislation and positive legislative measures, strategies and programmes to assist women. It had also developed a range of government-funded services to meet the specific needs of women, which were run by women for women. At the federal, state and territory levels, specialized government machinery had been set up to advise on issues relating to the status of women and to monitor and evaluate the outcomes for women of government policies and programmes. The machinery had been further strengthened by the establishment of a ministerial forum, the Commonwealth/State and Territories Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women. Australia was committed to consolidating and increasing the gains made towards full equality for women and the full implementation of the Convention. That commitment was reflected in the Federal Sex Discrimination Act, 1984. Each of the states and territories had enacted anti-discrimination legislation which was intended to operate concurrently with the Act. Amendments had been made to the Act in 1995 in order to link it more closely to the Convention. Australia recognized that far-reaching cultural and economic change could only happen over time, however.

5. The new Government of Australia, elected in March 1996, had reaffirmed and strengthened the policy of mainstreaming introduced by the previous Government, ensuring that all government departments addressed gender issues in their policies and programmes. Specialized units within departments played an important role in enhancing linkages and cooperation. Her Government was also encouraging women's organizations to work more closely with government departments, thereby promoting better communications and participation by

women's groups in policy decision-making and enabling women's organizations to access mainstream resources. It was committed to implementing policies to enable women to participate in the paid workforce through greater flexibility in the workplace, support for the provision of childcare and the development of broader options for employment and training. It was also committed to providing greater financial support for women who chose to stay at home. In a tight fiscal environment, however, difficult choices sometimes had to be made.

6. Following the massacre of 35 people at Port Arthur in 1996, stringent gun control laws had been introduced in Australia. Through the National Campaign Against Violence and Crime, her Government, in cooperation with the states and territories, would attempt to address some of the concerns women had expressed about crime and violence in Australia and coordinate crime prevention efforts. It had allocated $13 million over three years to the campaign.

7. In 1996, the Australian Bureau of Statistics had undertaken a national survey on violence against women. Its report, Women's Safety Australia, indicated that violence against women remained a significant issue and that preventive efforts must be increased. It was estimated that 7 per cent of the approximately 9 million women in Australia had experienced some form of violence in the 12 months prior to the survey. Only a small proportion of women who had been physically or sexually assaulted had contacted a crisis service. The challenge for governments and service organizations was how to address the damaging impact of violence on women and on children, since children who were abused or witnessed violence often grew up to be violent or to be victims of violence in adult life.

8. The Prime Minister planned to convene a National Domestic Violence Summit later in 1997; a National Domestic Violence Forum had been held in September 1996 and had been attended by experts from government and non-governmental sectors who had prepared specific and practical recommendations. Prior to the forum, a group of indigenous women had met to prepare input for the forum. The aim of the summit would be to develop a more comprehensive approach to preventing and responding to domestic violence across Australia and to facilitate national approaches to law reform, research, data collection and community education.

9. The portrayal of violence in the media was a serious issue which must be tackled. In April 1997, the Government had announced a number of decisions regarding the availability of sexually explicit and violent film and video material. A ministerial committee had been established to examine the portrayal of violence in the electronic media, and had made a number of recommendations. The community broadcasting sector had developed a self-regulatory code of practice, registered with the Australian Broadcasting Authority, banning the broadcasting of material which stereotyped or demeaned any person or group on the basis of gender.

10. Australia had established a national women's health policy with the objective of improving the health and well-being of women in Australia and encouraging the health system to be more responsive to the needs of women. The National Women's Health Programme, launched in April 1989, focused on improving primary health-care services to women who were at a disadvantage - whether

economically or because of geographical isolation - or for whom culturally appropriate services needed to be delivered. It was a requirement of funding that women should be actively involved in the provision of those services. A longitudinal study "Women's Health in Australia", designed to guide the future planning and delivery of health services for women, had commenced in 1996. The main study would follow a large group of women from urban, rural and remote areas for up to 20 years. Two special studies would be undertaken on the health of indigenous women and women from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Other programmes and services for Australian women included alternative birthing services and cancer screening programmes. The Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services in the Department of Health and Family Services was developing a strategy to improve training for Aboriginal health workers, promote breastfeeding and appropriate infant feeding, and support community controlled health services. Eleven per cent of the total funding for the women's health programmes was allocated to projects specifically intended for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and a further 35 projects included those women among their target groups.

11. Over the past 20 years, there had been an increase in the proportion of women in the medical profession. The Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee was undertaking research on issues affecting female participation in the medical workforce.

12. Her Government was concerned that young women and girls migrating to Australia, particularly from the Horn of Africa, might be at risk of female genital mutilation practices after settling in Australia; legislation prohibiting such practices had been introduced in most states and territories since 1995. In consultation with the relevant ethnic communities, the National Education Programme on Female Genital Mutilation in the Department of Health and Family Services had developed a programme to prevent female genital mutilation in Australia, assist women and girls living in Australia who had already undergone the practice, and assist health and other workers in providing culturally appropriate services to ethnic communities. In addition, the Royal Australian College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists was developing material for inclusion in curricula in health training institutions.

13. The Committee had encouraged Australia to adopt new temporary measures to increase women's participation in politics at the state and federal levels. The latest federal elections had increased the number of women in the Federal Parliament to 15.5 per cent of representatives in the lower house and 30 per cent in the upper house. The total percentage of women representatives in the Australian parliament was now 21 per cent, an increase of 6 per cent in just two years, and a level that was nearly double the international average. In addition, there were now four women ministers, two of whom were in the Cabinet. In 1996, the first woman president of the senate had been elected, and in 1997, for the first time, both the president and the vice-president of the senate had been women.

14. All the major political parties had implemented strategies to seek out potential women candidates and develop their skills and experience. Over the past decade, the proportion of female parliamentarians in the states and territories had increased from 9 per cent to 17 per cent. Three state or

territory governments had been led by women in recent years. Women's representation in local government had also increased from 13 per cent in 1986 to 25 per cent in 1996. Her Government would continue to work for greater participation by women in Parliament. It believed that its efforts to identify, encourage and provide mentoring for skilled women were more effective than arbitrary quotas. The Office of the Status of Women had updated and republished Every Woman's Guide to Getting into Politics, which had been widely distributed. It was also implementing a strategy to improve the participation rates of women on commonwealth boards and bodies, which would be tested through a pilot programme in a number of government departments. In the private sector, the Office of the Status of Women, in cooperation with the Australian Council of Businesswomen, industry groups and businesses, was undertaking a study of ways to identify suitable women candidates for company boards.

15. Recent figures suggested that the private sector was slowly responding to change. Overall, women held 24 per cent of management positions in the private sector, and comprised 14 per cent of middle management. The Affirmative Action Agency had established affirmative action awards for employers. Since 1993, the Agency had been undertaking an education strategy to assist organizations in implementing effective affirmative action programmes; an accreditation scheme, to be introduced in 1998, would recognize and reward organizations with high quality affirmative action programmes.

16. Over the past 10 years, the number of women participating in the Australian labour force had grown by 30 per cent; women now made up 43 per cent of employed persons. Part-time and casual work had become much more common, as well as flexible hours and teleworking. The ability to combine family and work responsibilities effectively remained a significant challenge for Australian workplaces, however. Her Government was funding a variety of childcare services and subsidizing fees for eligible families. It also provided childcare assistance and childcare cash rebates to needy families. Total expenditure on childcare would be $1.146 billion in the current financial year, with further real growth anticipated.

17. In 1996, her Government had established a new country-wide legislative basis for industrial relations, designed to support more flexible and productive workplace relations. The legislation provided, in particular, for a minimum of 12 months' parental leave, and for improved job security for employees with family responsibilities, and facilitated part-time working arrangements and the formalization of workplace agreements to suit individual circumstances. An Office of the Employee Advocate had been established to provide advice and assistance in regard to agreements, with particular attention being paid to the needs of women, and of other categories of employees, in order to assist them to balance work and family responsibilities.

18. Between 1986 and 1996, there had been a marginal narrowing of the discrepancy between average male and female earnings; in 1996, for example, non-managerial female employees earned 89.5 per cent of equivalent male earnings, which represented an increase of 0.8 per cent as compared with 1986.

19. Her Government recognized the special needs of women in workplace relations matters through Working Women's Centres which provided information and

assistance to women on a range of workplace issues and operated mainly as a referral point to government departments and other agencies which enabled women to get reliable information on matters such as training and working conditions, employment discrimination and occupational health and safety.

20. Equality for women could not be achieved without economic security and independence. However, owing to a combination of reasons, including the fact that women lived longer than men, had longer periods outside the labour force and were more likely to be primary carers of children and others, Australian women remained disproportionately dependent on social security payments.

21. Women in Australia had access to a comprehensive income security safety net and were entitled, depending on their circumstances, to a wide range of payments from the social security system including a parenting allowance and sole parent pension, a partner allowance, which was a form of income support available to certain groups of older women not in the workforce, a maternity allowance and income supplements available to families with children. Income support was also available for both women and men who were not in the workforce because of unemployment, sickness, disability, or because they were caring for a person with a disability, or because of retirement.

22. In order to ensure that women's broken participation in the labour force and their relatively low pay did not put them at a disadvantage in relation to provision for their old age through superannuation, the Government had taken measures to ensure that spouses could contribute to their partner's superannuation fund or retirement savings account and receive a rebate if their partner was earning less than a specified amount. Retirement savings accounts were also available from most financial institutions and were designed to be especially suited to those with small superannuation contributions, the intention being to provide all low-income earners with greater flexibility to make arrangements for their retirement.

23. Her Government's instrument of ratification of the Convention contained two reservations, one relating to the introduction of maternity leave with pay, or with comparable social benefits, and the second relating to the employment of women in combat and combat-related duties in the Australian Defence Force.

24. In regard to maternity leave, significant progress had been made since her country had last reported to the Committee in 1992, but the Government was not in a position to remove its reservation as the provision of paid maternity leave varied considerably between and within the public and private sectors. Workers were entitled to up to 52 weeks' unpaid maternity leave. To assist families with extra costs incurred at the time of the birth of a baby, a maternity allowance had been introduced in February 1996 in the form of a non-taxable, lump-sum payment made to families that met the residence, income and assets tests.

25. Her country's current reservation relating to the Australian Defence Force was out of step with Government policy because a previous exemption in the legislation in respect of women in Australian Defence Force combat-related employment areas had been removed through an amendment to the Sex Discrimination Amendment Bill 1995. Almost 90 per cent of all employment areas in the

Australian Defence Force were open to women, the exemptions being areas of "combat duties" where the duties required a person to commit, or to participate directly in the commission of, an act of violence against an adversary in time of war. The Government was currently considering a recommendation that the reference in its reservation to the Convention relating to combat-related employment areas should be removed.

26. Her Government was in the process of ratifying the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention to remove the existing two-week limitation on the Committee's annual meeting time. In addition, her country supported the development of an Optional Protocol to the Convention and had begun the process of national consultation on the draft text that had been adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women.

27. Australia rejected racism in all its forms, but no society was without extremists and opportunists. Over the past 18 months, wide coverage had been given in the media and in political forums in Australia to the issues of race and the level of government assistance to groups with particular disadvantages. The Government's position in that debate had consistently been that people from anywhere in the world were welcome to come to Australia and, subject to its immigration programme, to live there and become Australian citizens. Australia had a sustained and continuing record as an open democracy, a fact that was overwhelmingly acknowledged and celebrated by Australians. While legislative guarantees of the entitlement of every Australian to respect and dignity were provided at the federal level and in many states and territories, legislation could not control every instance of prejudice, to which migrant and indigenous women were particularly vulnerable. The Australian Government continued to support legislation designed to control extreme forms of racist behaviour and to recognize that such legislation could set standards of appropriate behaviour.

28. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, established in 1991, was committed to addressing indigenous disadvantage and to promoting the process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community. Recognizing that if reconciliation was to succeed it must be a people's movement, the Council had focused its attention on the long-term, cooperative processes required to achieve change and had, in particular, arranged a large number of meetings throughout the country which had been well attended. Women's meetings associated with the Convention had contributed to research commissioned by the Council into the particular role of women in the reconciliation process, and women's reconciliation groups had been formed in major cities and rural areas in most Australian states and territories.

29. Since the decision of the High Court in Mabo v. The State of Queensland, progress had been achieved on the issue of land rights. The High Court's Mabo (No. 2) decision of June 1992 had overturned the concept of terra nullius and recognized the existence of native title, referring to the overall interests and rights of all indigenous inhabitants in land, without reference to gender. The Native Title Act, passed in 1993, had provided for the recognition and protection of native title and had established a mechanism for determining claims to native title.

30. Since its Mabo (No. 2) decision, the High Court, in its decision in the Wik case, had adjudicated the sometimes conflicting claims of pastoral leases and native title to land. In particular, the Court had found that native title may not in all cases be extinguished by the grant of particular pastoral leases, that the effect of a pastoral lease on any native title must be determined on a case-by-case basis, and that any coexisting native title rights must "yield" to the rights of the pastoralist whose interests will "prevail" to the extent of any inconsistency.

31. Her Government was currently considering its response to the decision, and legislation was expected to be introduced in the Federal Parliament later in 1997 to address the rights of native title-holders and the legitimate interests of pastoralists.

32. A report had been submitted to the Federal Parliament in May 1997 on the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families containing 54 recommendations which could be grouped into three categories concerning: reparation or compensation for the individuals, their families, communities and descendants; reunion, health and other services for those affected by past policies and practices; and legislative change to standardize current policies and practices on a national basis. Her Government was committed to a careful consideration of the report and of its recommendations, and to the development of a practical and realistic response.

33. A number of measures had been taken to address the problems of ill health among indigenous women in Australia, which also affected infants, children and families, and to which the Government attached the highest priority. The measures covered such fields as childbirth, reproductive and sexual information and services, programmes centred around the importance of breastfeeding, mental health, diabetes and sexual health, strategies to develop early diagnoses of HIV in indigenous peoples, the treatment, care and support of indigenous peoples living with HIV/AIDS and the control of sexually transmitted diseases.

34. The principal model for service delivery was the service controlled by the indigenous community and the policy was to consult indigenous women on all strategies in order to ensure that culturally appropriate actions were taken. Many women's health programmes were conducted by community-controlled services, and funded substance-abuse services conducted programmes specifically focusing on violence against women. The prevention of family violence and the promotion of family well-being in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continued to be a high priority for the Government. However, effective intervention depended on recognizing the interconnections between injury and violence and other health issues confronting communities such as grief and loss, and alcohol and substance misuse, to which a wide-ranging holistic approach was adopted.

35. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in urban areas had better opportunities to gain access to appropriate services and community infrastructure, including housing. In rural and remote regions of Australia, clean water, sanitation, appropriate housing, electricity and roads were still major problems, and in spite of the substantial financial contribution made annually to housing and infrastructure by the programmes of the Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander Commission, there remained a very substantial shortfall in the availability of funds required to deal with those problems. Progress towards appropriate environmental health infrastructure for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remained an issue for her Government.

36. Australia was proud of its achievements to date in implementing the Convention, and believed that difficulties in promoting far-reaching cultural and economic change would only be overcome with the support and acceptance of the community. It remained determined to consolidate and build upon its achievements to realize the fundamental shift in attitudes and practices which would mark true equality for women in Australian society and bring about the full participation of women in their community to the benefit of their family, the community and the nation.

37. Turning to the questions on the third periodic report posed by the Committee, she said that the major obstacles to implementation of the Convention had not changed since the submission of the second periodic report. Despite universal access to health care, significant disparities continued to exist between the health of the general population in Australia and that of particular groups, especially indigenous peoples and those living in rural and remote areas.

38. Women's right to economic security and independence continued to be central to Government policies. The high concentration of women in the lowest-paid employment sectors and women's access to adequate retirement income were key issues yet to be addressed. Paid maternity leave was still not widely available outside the public sector, and employment opportunities for young women were limited. Young women aged 15 to 19 consistently had a higher unemployment rate, currently 31 per cent, compared to 26 per cent for young men in that age group. The ability to combine family and work responsibilities also remained a significant challenge. Caring was a gender issue which had emerged as a social policy issue as well. Australian women still carried the primary responsibility for the care of children, the sick, the disabled and the elderly.

39. Inequality in the sharing of power and decision-making continued to be a major concern. Without women's participation in the debate concerning Australia's future, the outcome would not reflect the hopes and aspirations of all its citizens. Community attitudes towards full equality for women, however, often lagged behind legislative initiatives, and the Government's role was often limited to leadership and facilitation.

40. From 1993 until June 1996, there had been 169 complaints of victimization under the Sex Discrimination Act. A further 16 had been received in the central office between July 1996 and June 1997. Of the latter, 14 had been referred to hearing, six of which had been settled or withdrawn. Of the remaining eight, three had been upheld, four dismissed and one found to be in the wrong forum. The amended Act was not applicable throughout Australia, but all states and territories had implemented their own sex discrimination legislation to complement the Commonwealth Act.

41. Since the resignation of the Sex Discrimination Commissioner in February 1997, that position had been filled by other Commissioners under

delegation while the Government considered the issue of a permanent appointment to the post.

42. Legislation, policy and programmes were reviewed on an ongoing basis to determine their impact on target groups. However, there had been no overall evaluation of the cumulative effect of measures to eliminate discrimination against women in Australia.

43. Explaining the background to the Administrative Decisions (Effect of International Treaties) Bill 1997, she said that it was a longstanding principle that the provisions of a treaty to which Australia was a party did not form part of Australian law unless they had been incorporated into domestic law by statute. Under the Constitution, the Government had the power to make Australia a party to a treaty, but it was for Australian parliaments to change the law to implement treaty obligations. The bill mentioned would not affect the operation of legislation passed to give effect to Australia's obligations under the Convention.

44. From 1993 until June 1996, 49 complaints of dismissal on the grounds of family responsibility had been made under the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Legislation Amendment Act 1992. The Government did not currently plan any constitutional amendment to enshrine the principle of equality between women and men in the Australian Constitution.

45. With regard to compliance with the Equal Opportunity for Women Act, in 1992-1993, 11 organizations had been reported as failing to comply. After a review of their status in 1996, it was determined that four were meeting the requirements, two had gone out of business, and four still were not complying with the legislation. In 1996, the Affirmative Action Agency had introduced the Best Employers in Affirmative Action Awards, intended to identify, recognize and reward best practices in affirmative action. Six organizations had received the biennial award in 1996. The Agency's accreditation scheme, to be introduced in 1998, would recognize organizations with high-quality programmes as "Employers of Choice". In summary, it could be said that affirmative action legislation was having a positive impact in the firms it covered, and there had been a significant improvement in women's managerial representation.

46. When introduced in 1984, the Women's Budget Statement had been an innovation which provided information about the impact of government policies on women and instigated a process whereby departments were required to examine their activities from a gender perspective. Although a useful tool, the document was lengthy and its preparation required a great deal of resources. In 1996, the Government had decided that supplementary budget details would be released in the form of ministerial papers, which were more concise and considered the impact of policies on the status of women across portfolios.

47. In general, people living in urban areas had better access to services than those in rural and remote areas. Progress toward appropriate health infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remained an issue. The Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women had disseminated widely an English language version of the Convention, but it had not been translated into other languages.

48. The recommendations contained in the report Half Way to Equal had in large part been implemented. The Parliamentary Committee had received only a few submissions from Aboriginal women, however, which might reflect the accessibility of parliamentary inquiries to certain communities. Those comments received on the special needs of Aboriginal women concentrated on access to education and training.

49. The Office of the Status of Women had ceased operation of its Register of Women in September 1996. The register had been based on self-nomination, which did not ensure that the women included had the necessary skills or experience for certain positions. A more strategic approach would be more effective in improving representation of women in decision-making positions.

50. The organizations recognized for excellence in affirmative action programmes had taken up affirmative action as a business issue and integrated it with their human resources management and industrial relations practice, and had based their programmes on a clear understanding of their particular needs and circumstances. While such organizations had much in common, their programmes were specific to their individual needs. For example, organizations with a large proportion of women staff had put into place career development or work and family initiatives, while those with a more male-dominated environment had put in place strategies to attract and retain women.

51. There were no statistics or evaluations showing the impact on the population of programmes to change the portrayal of women in the media and in advertising. The Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations had a Code of Practice and related Advisory Notes which, among other things, recommended the avoidance of stereotyped gender portrayals and of language that unnecessarily excluded one sex, better balance in the use of women and men as experts and authorities and more coverage of women's achievements in areas such as sport. The Code had been revised in 1996; the Federation had invited public comment on it and on the Advisory Notes. Although Australia's national broadcasters were required to develop codes of practice, their programming and editorial policy were independent of the Government. The advertising industry, though regularly monitored, was self-regulating. The National Working Party on the Portrayal of Women in the Media had produced a Portrayal of Women in Advertising Kit aimed at tertiary-education students.

52. Under the programme to change the portrayal of Filipino women as brides or sex objects, the availability of more information had raised the awareness of migrant women, including Filipino women, of their status as equal marriage partners, and had reiterated anti-domestic violence messages. The programme also sought to enhance the integrity of Australia's migration programme.

53. There were no standardized data for the whole of Australia on how many women had filed suit against their partners for the crime of violence; the statistics for different states were not comparable owing to differences in state legislation. In Queensland, 11,442 applications for protection orders under domestic violence legislation had been filed in 1994-1995; in New South Wales, 22,128 applications under criminal legislation had been filed in 1995. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were entitled to the same protection under the law as other Australian women. However, in some cases they preferred

to adopt a community approach to resolving domestic violence issues rather than using the criminal justice system.

54. The 1994 law on child sex tourism made it an offence for Australian citizens or residents to engage in sexual conduct, while overseas, with persons under the age of 16 years, or to organize, promote or encourage child sex tours. One person had been convicted under that law and three other cases were currently proceeding. Such offences were punishable by imprisonment or fines or both. Encouraging conduct that would constitute an offence (such as by assisting a person to travel outside Australia to commit an offence) was also penalized under that law. The law applied to offences committed in any country and was intended as a backstopping measure to allow the prosecution of Australian citizens who escaped the criminal justice system of the country in which the offence was committed.

55. Each state and territory of Australia had its own legislation on prostitution. In the Australian Capital Territory, which had legalized prostitution, a ministerial advisory body had been established to ensure the effectiveness of the relevant legislation. That body considered issues relating to the sex industry, including health practices, workers' compensation, occupational health and safety, legal issues and a code of conduct. In New South Wales, prostitution had never been illegal, though brothels could be established only in certain areas. The Northern Territory's Prostitution Regulation Act 1992 was currently under review. Prostitution was illegal in Queensland. In South Australia, two bills were currently before the Parliament: one would keep prostitution illegal, while the other would provide for its regulation. In Victoria, prostitution was regulated and an advisory committee had been established to advise the state government on issues related to the prostitution industry. In Western Australia, the current policy regarding prostitution was under review. Child prostitution was illegal in all of the states and territories.

56. With respect to "mail-order brides", most Filipino women met their Australian partners through friends or family members instead of through introduction agencies. Although such agencies were legal, migration applicants were required to establish that they personally knew the sponsor they had married or intended to marry. With respect to serial sponsorship, legislation had been tightened and more information on the issue was being provided to migrants and prospective migrants. A new computer programme had been introduced to identify serial sponsors, but it was still too early for the system to provide evidence of the impact of the preventive measures taken.

57. One indicator of the effectiveness of government measures to prevent violence against migrant women was the number of applications under the domestic violence provision of migration regulations. Between February 1994 and July 1995, about 100 applications had been filed under the provision; between July 1995 and June 1996, 83 applications had been filed, out of a total of 19,379 eligible applicants. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs had produced videotapes and booklets on marriage and migration, which had been well received.

58. The Australian Customs Service had prepared a warning pamphlet alerting outgoing tourists to the commencement of the child sex tourism law, and signs to that effect had been placed in departure halls. Australia had also developed closer law enforcement cooperation between its agencies and their counterparts in selected countries to combat child sex tourism involving Australians. The state and territory police forces had agreed to cooperate fully with Commonwealth authorities in the investigation and prosecution of paedophile activities.

59. With respect to the use of the Internet to promote sex tourism, Commonwealth legislation adopted in 1994 made it an offence to knowingly or recklessly use a carrier-supplied telecommunications service in such a way as would be regarded as offensive. State and territory legislation on the subject had also been adopted in Victoria, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

60. The report's reference, under article 7, to parliamentary behaviour which was denigrating to women reflected the concerns expressed by female parliamentarians in Tasmania in the context of an inquiry into possibilities for the reform of the Tasmanian Parliament. Those parliamentarians had felt that the conduct and behaviour in Parliament was intimidating to women and acted as a barrier to their participation. As a consequence of the inquiry, a Code of Ethical Conduct and a Code of Race Ethics had been developed to uphold the principles of respect for differences and fairness in political dealings. The inquiry had also found that media coverage of parliamentary activity often presented women parliamentarians in a sexist and denigrating manner. It had recommended the establishment of guidelines for the media, but no action had been taken in that regard.

61. Although political parties were not required to include women in their lists of candidates, the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 guaranteed the rights of both women and men to engage in lawful electoral activities, and the major political parties had instituted programmes to encourage women to become candidates.

62. Of the 80 Australian foreign service posts, 7 were currently headed by women. In the financial year 1996/97, there had been 10 women heads of posts.

63. With respect to the Committee's request for details on enrolment rates among Aboriginal women and girls, the figures were 31,749 in primary education in 1996; 14,009 in secondary education in 1996; and 4,352 in tertiary education in 1997.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.